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SUBJECT: THIS, TOO, IS LIBERIA: FEBRUARY 18, 2010

¶1. (U) This round-up cable, named after a popular daily feature in a local newspaper, covers the following topics:

-- PRESIDENT SIRLEAF'S PARTY CONTINUES TO BUILD MOMENTUM
-- UN MISSION IN LIBERIA RELEASES HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT
-- COUNCIL OF CHURCHES MEMBERS DIVIDED OVER RESPONSE TO TRC RECOMMENDATIONS
-- GOL, UNMIL RESPOND TO RUMORS OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN GANTA
-- TRILATERAL DISCUSSIONS ON AFL TRAINING
-- LIBERIAN TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM WORKSHOP COMPLETED
-- LIBERIA ESTABLISHES CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY FORUM

¶2. (SBU) PRESIDENT SIRLEAF'S PARTY CONTINUES TO BUILD MOMENTUM: At least seven members of the House of Representatives (including three from former presidential candidate George Weah's Congress for Democratic Change) have joined President Sirleaf's Unity Party (UP) since the beginning of 2010. The UP also recently cemented its merger with the Liberia Action Party (LAP) and Liberia Unification Party (LUP) at a February 5-7 UP conference. LAP and LUP were components of the Coalition for the Transformation of Liberia (COTOL) in the 2005 election. COTOL's presidential candidate, the LAP's Varney Sherman, was previously one of President Sirleaf's most outspoken critics, but is now an avid supporter. Opposition parties remain fragmented and appear far from forming a coalition capable of threatening the UP's dominant position ahead of the 2011 election, although rumors of a new party bringing together the disgruntled from several parties, including the UP, are ripe.

¶3. (U) UN MISSION IN LIBERIA (UNMIL) RELEASES HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT: UNMIL released its human rights situation report for January-June 2009. The document noted some improvement in institutional protection of human rights, but with significant gaps remaining, notably for children and women, because of capacity and resource constraints. Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the report noted, has been slow, and cites several instances where defendants' due process and fair trial rights were violated. The report's recommendations include judicial training, witness protection programs, more defense attorneys, and more funding and staffing for Criminal Court E, which deals with gender and children's issues. The report can be found at:

http://unmил.org/documents/final.biannual.rep.ort_jan_june_2009.pdf.

¶4. (SBU) COUNCIL OF CHURCHES MEMBERS DIVIDED OVER RESPONSE TO TRC RECOMMENDATIONS: Seventy-six Liberian ministers are reportedly planning to call for the replacement of the Liberian Council of

Churches' (LCC) leadership. LCC leaders have actively promoted a reconciliatory response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) reports' recommendations, which is outlined in a widely distributed USD 6 million project proposal. The scheme includes a national "palava hut" process to reconcile those listed for sanction in the report with their accusers. The aggrieved ministers charge that the current leadership is trying to prevent implementation of the TRC's recommendations and divert project funds to leaders' personal bank accounts. The LCC draws membership nearly all of Liberia's Christian denominations.

¶15. (SBU) GOL, UNMIL RESPOND TO RUMORS OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN GANTA: The Liberia National Police dispatched three Emergency Response Unit teams (totaling 16 officers) to Ganta, Nimba County on February 12, after reports surfaced of planned demonstrations that weekend by Mandingo youth over land tenure issues. UNMIL also mobilized Formed Police Units. The demonstrations never materialized, either because of the large dissuasive presence, or because the reports were simply malicious rumor. Local officials believe that "The Concerned Youth of Ganta City, Nimba County for Reconstruction and Development," which publishes unsigned tracts that are sometimes reported in the press, is based in Monrovia and is behind the rumors. In May 2006, a similar rumor raised tensions in Ganta. Land disputes between the predominantly Muslim Mandingos and predominantly Christian Gios and Manos have plagued the region

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as Mandingos displaced during the civil war attempt to reclaim their property.

¶16. (U) TRILATERAL DISCUSSIONS ON AFL TRAINING: In an effort to develop a strategy for training of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) using resources from the USG's Liberia Defense Sector Reform program, UNMIL and the GOL Embassy Office of Security Cooperation (OSC) met with the AFL commander in chief (COIC) and UNMIL's Force Commander (FC) to discuss use of AFL facilities for future training. The COIC outlined existing AFL needs (e.g. Camp Toddee development, training classes, etc.). The FC proposed a joint survey visit to Camp Toddee and development of an action plan on how best to utilize the base. OSC and FC agree that Camp Toddee should be developed as a training area consisting of ranges and bivouac sites, but with few permanent structures, keeping down the cost of rehabilitating the training site.

¶17. (U) LIBERIAN TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM (LTTP) WORKSHOP COMPLETED: As part of USAID's ongoing assistance to improving teacher performance, Liberian County Education Officers, District Education Officers, and teacher trainers completed a two-day LTTP workshop on "Job Description and Capacity Building Needs." The group, selected as the best candidates from an earlier workshop, produced a draft "job descriptions" document for Ministry of Education use. In an open discussion, participants agreed that the Ministry of Education does not do enough to ensure that teachers are aware of their responsibilities. Similar training was suggested for ministers.

¶18. (U) LIBERIA ESTABLISHES CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY FORUM:

Corporate Responsibility Forum, the joint creation of Arcelor Mittal and German aid agency GTZ, held its initial meeting on February 12. Attending were representatives of foreign businesses (including Arcelor Mittal, Firestone, BHP Billiton), cabinet members, the Ambassador, and President Sirleaf. In her remarks, the President applauded the forum for promoting cooperation between the government and private sector and sustainable and responsible business practices. She also reminded the private sector representatives of their tax and social fund obligations, which has been an area of chronic tension between government and private sector.

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